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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000473

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA - A/DAS SPIRNAK, NEA/PI AND NEA/MAG
STATE ALSO FOR DRL/NESCA AND NEA/PPD
TUNIS FOR MEPI REGIONAL OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [KPMI](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: USG, NDI AND IRI TEAM UP TO HELP ELECT WOMEN AND
BUILD DEMOCRACY IN MOROCCO

1. (SBU) Summary: Swift USG action to back Morocco's decision to dramatically expand the number of elected women has meant thousands of women were trained to run in local elections scheduled for June 12. The election will yield a more than a twenty-fold increase in women counselors and a fifteen-fold increase in the total number of elected women in Morocco, providing a long-term boost to democracy. For a little over half a million dollars, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funded countrywide training by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). This unprecedented 11-week cooperative effort directly trained nearly 4,000 women from 41 cities throughout Morocco on campaign methods, communication and leadership skills, reaching a fifth of the 20,000 women who are running for the more than 3,200 reserved seats, with others on regular party lists. Training materials distributed to the political parties and through the Internet will reach many more. Recipients praised the training, saying it prepared them to campaign and win. Their enthusiasm may help marginally boost overall turnout. Many winners will go on to be elected to regional councils and the upper house of Parliament. Post recommends immediate action on a short-fuse follow up MEPI project and consideration of longer term funding to mentor this new generation of women politicians, with positive, potentially transformational implications for political development in Morocco. End Summary.

2. (SBU) With MEPI funds, IRI and NDI have teamed up to provide training and support to women interested in running as candidates in the June 12 local elections in Morocco. Late in 2008, Parliament amended the electoral code to provide for more than 3,000 additional seats, some 12 percent of the total, which the parties agreed to reserve for women. The product of extensive agitation by Moroccan women and influence from Europe, where such reservations are not unknown, the amendment was drafted with the help of USAID's Local Governance Program. The training was coordinated with an existing joint initiative of the Ministry of Interior and Minister of Social Development, Family, and Solidarity, supported by the UN's women's program, UNIFEM. The objectives were to encourage women to run, help them choose a party, get on the party nomination lists, launch strong campaigns, and win.

IRI Up North, NDI Down South
and Everywhere on the Web

3. (SBU) To maximize efficiency, NDI and IRI leaders agreed to split the country geographically, with IRI taking the north and NDI taking Casablanca and the south. With USD

250,000 in MEPI funding, IRI conducted 50 seminars led by professional Moroccan master trainers in 28 cities for 2,733 participants. IRI delivered the interactive weekend sessions in regional dialects, drawing from an IRI women's candidate training manual specifically prepared for the election. IRI Country Director Jamie Tronnes said the weekend conferences gave women the opportunity to network with political parties or choose one in which to run, and feel empowered to exert their leadership skills in their communities. IRI continued to receive training requests from major political parties after the formal training sessions ended on May 10.

¶4. (SBU) With part of its MEPI grant, IRI developed and launched a website (www.formationmaroc.org) that provided women candidates or potential candidates access to on-line training sessions on leadership and political campaign development. A copy of the IRI training manual is available for anyone to download free of charge. The Ministry of Interior recently provided 200,000 MAD (approximately USD 25,000) to each major political party for their own training of women. With not enough time or money to develop a program of their own, many parties used the IRI (or NDI) materials.

¶5. (SBU) MEPI provided USD 330,000 for NDI to conduct nine trainings in 13 cities for 1,030 female participants. NDI's efforts followed a "Train the Trainers" model, using a team of 10 Moroccan experts leading sessions on: campaign planning, fundamentals of democratic processes, the role of elected officials and their relationships within the party, communication techniques, and training methodologies. NDI's candidate training guide is now available on-line (www.aswat.com) along with a campaign legal guide, video clips of training sessions, interviews with women candidates,

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and an on-line forum for potential candidates to discuss issues. NDI Program Officer Siham Bojji conservatively estimated that those who directly participated in its training sessions have trained an additional 200 women. NDI also trained 474 women and men from political parties under a USD 120,000 MEPI grant for training poll watchers.

Women Prepared to Run and Win

¶6. (SBU) In exit interviews, participants lauded both programs. One NDI participant, a communal counselor from Agadir, said, "This training will permit women to be confident when running their campaign. It provides all the necessary knowledge ... that will help the women run a good campaign and compete with men." An IRI trainee said the course "encouraged all participants to take part in the 2009 municipal elections" and "really opened doors for members of our political party."

¶7. (SBU) NDI and IRI officials reported that trainees were especially interested in learning how to incorporate new technology into their political campaigns. IRI conducted some sessions on internet blogging. Both groups shared that participants were very receptive to the use of cell phone (SMS) text messages and mass e-mail campaigns, after learning that President Obama incorporated such tactics in his own successful political campaign last fall. The training sessions encouraged women candidates to identify potential voters, obtain their e-mail addresses and SMS numbers, and remain in contact with them during the campaign period.

Follow-Up/Next-Steps

¶8. (SBU) On May 29, the parties submitted their final candidate lists and the two-week campaign season officially began. NDI and IRI staff are working to determine how many candidates and campaign organizers participated in their

training sessions. In sum, IRI trained 2,733 potential women candidates in 28 cities across northern Morocco. IRI has made a random check of its participants, and about half of the fifty women contacted so far were either already on a ticket or actively seeking one, that would extrapolate to nearly 1,500 new women office seekers. Moroccan press reported June 2 that in total, 20,458 women had registered to run. Of this number, 52.2 percent were under the age of 35; Tronnes opined that she was surprised and encouraged to see so many young women candidates. Based on discussions with trainees, both IRI and NDI predicted that the new role for women would help raise the overall election participation rate above 40 percent. It was 37 percent in the 2007 parliamentary elections and historically has been even lower for the local polls. This suggests increased involvement by women as voters, too.

¶9. (SBU) Both institutes are interested in follow up work with the women, both with those who are elected and also with those who may not win this time, but are interested in long-term political involvement, as well as those who this time may only have supported candidates, but not run themselves. MEPI is now finalizing action on a proposal submitted by the Embassy for a short-term intervention to support those who would have won a seat and then seek the provincial regional or national posts that will be chosen by them and their fellow council members over the summer, and we hope final approval can be quickly secured to permit this low-cost, high-value, but small time-window effort. IRI is interested in formulating a follow-up program for the newly elected women and will seek MEPI or USAID funding for it. This could focus on the mission's cross-cutting goal of anti-corruption, along with good governance, legislative processes, and constituent relations. Other donors will also be funding specific training for the newly elected.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) No pilot project, this NDI/IRI effort has yielded phenomenal results in a relatively short period, directly touching thousands of newly engaged women all over the country. We will separately report insights from some of the women. Limited and anecdotal histories suggest that at

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present elected women in Morocco likely will govern more transparently and more effectively than the current men in politics. The Mission is grateful to MEPI Washington for funding this project in record time and hopes MEPI can finalize an already submitted short-fuse follow-up project for immediately after the elections to help the victors move up the political ladder. We suggest considering additional work with NDI, IRI or others to provide the newly elected women officials further guidance in their new responsibilities, alongside other donor efforts. We also believe that a long-term mentoring program for this emergent generation of thousands of new women politicians could have additional significant, even transformational impact on political life in Morocco. End Comment.

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